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ABSTRACT

The paternal estate of U.S. President James Madison is nestled at the foot of Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains. The estate, Montpelier, features a large mansion designed for hospitality, a fine garden, and a widespread lawn. In the early 19th century, countless visitors expressed a great sense of pleasure in the place and the people who lived there. James Madison (1751-1836) was deeply rooted in his family estate which his grandparents had settled in the early 1730s. In the late 1750s, his father began building the house where Madison grew up and to which he returned following his retirement as president in 1817. This lesson is based on the National Register of Historic Places file for "Montpelier," and other sources. The lesson can be used in teaching units about early 19th-century U.S. history. It cites educational objectives and materials needed. The lesson is divided into eight sections: (1) "About This Lesson"; (2) "Getting Started: Inquiry Question"; (3) "Setting the Stage: Historical Context"; (4) "Locating the Site: Maps" (Virginia and the Chesapeake Bay Region); (5) "Determining the Facts: Readings" (Daily Life at Montpelier; Slavery at Montpelier; James and Dolley Madison at Montpelier); (6) "Visual Evidence: Images" (Montpelier, c. 1836; Montpelier, 1994); (7) "Putting It All Together: Activities" (Researching the Madisons; Slavery and Freedom; A Historic Place in Your Neighborhood); and (8) "Supplementary Resources." (BT)

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Memories of Montpelier: Home of James and Dolley Madison

Reflecting back on her many visits to James and Dolley Madison's plantation home, Dolley's longtime friend, Margaret Bayard Smith, described the Montpelier she had grown to love:

(Courtesy of Virginia Department of Historic Resources)

Courtesy of Scenic America)

...among the hills [at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains]..., is the paternal estate of Mr. Madison. Naturally fertile, but much improved by his judicious care, a comparatively small part is kept under cultivation, the greater part being covered with its native forests. A large and commodious mansion, designed more for comfort and hospitality than ornament and display, rises at the foot of a high wooded hill, which, while it affords shelter from the northwest winds, adds much to the picturesque beauty of the scene. The grounds around the house owe their ornaments more to nature than art, as with the exception of a fine garden behind, and a widespread lawn before the house, for miles around the ever varying and undulating surface of the ground is covered with forest trees.[1]

Smith was not alone in her sentiment about Montpelier. In the early 19th century countless visitors expressed a great sense of pleasure in the place and in the people who lived there. They quickly understood how deeply James Madison (1751-1836) was rooted in his family estate. His grandparents had settled Montpelier in the early 1730s. In the late 1750s Madison's father began building the house where Madison grew up and to which he returned permanently following his retirement as president in 1817. Madison enjoyed the opportunities and met the responsibilities of education and public service associated with the wealthy Southern gentry to which he belonged. Ultimately, he took part in the most crucial years of our nation's development. His greatest contribution was his service as "Father" of the Constitution.

[1]*James B. Longacre and James Herring, eds.,* The National Portrait Gallery of Distinguished Americans *(New York: Herman Bancroft, 1836).*

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Supplementary Resources

This lesson is based on Montpelier, one of the thousands of properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Montpelier has also been designated a National Historic Landmark.

About This Lesson

This lesson is based on the National Register of Historic Places registration file for "Montpelier," a National Trust for Historic Preservation/Montpelier historic structure report, and other sources about the social history of Montpelier. *Memories of Montpelier* was written by Candace Boyer, a former Museum Educator at Montpelier. The lesson was edited by Fay Metcalf, education consultant, and the Teaching with Historic Places staff.

Where it fits into the curriculum

Topics: The lesson could be used in teaching units on early 19th-century American history. The lesson will help students gain a better understanding of James and Dolley Madison, of daily life at home, and of contemporary beliefs and behaviors regarding slavery.

Time period: 1801-1836. See attached sheet with Relevant United States History Standards for Grades 5-12

Objectives for students

1) To describe Montpelier and aspects of daily life there from James Madison's tenure as secretary of state through his retirement years (1801-1836).

2) To explore the lives of James and Dolley Madison through the eyes of their contemporaries.

3) To examine the ideas and actions of the Madisons and others regarding slavery.

4) To evaluate a historic place and the people associated with it in their own community.

Materials for students

The materials listed below either can be used directly on the computer or can be printed out, photocopied, and distributed to students

1) one map of the Chesapeake Bay region;

2) three readings from contemporary correspondence about daily life, slavery, and the Madisons at Montpelier;

3) one illustration and one photo of historical and modern views of Montpelier.

Visiting the site

Montpelier is one of 20 historic museum properties owned by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. It is located four miles southwest of Orange, Virginia, on Route 20, and lies approximately 25 miles north of Charlottesville and 70 miles south of Washington, D.C. It is open to the public daily April through November: 9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. December through March it is open 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily. Montpelier is closed on New Year's Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day. For more information, write to Montpelier, 11407 Constitution Highway, P.O. Box 67, Montpelier Station, VA 22957, or visit the Montpelier Web site at http://www.montpelier.org/

United States History Standards for Grades 5-12
Memories of Montpelier:
Home of James and Dolley Madison
relates to the following
National Standards for History:

Era 3: Revolution and the New Nation (1754 to 1820s)

- Standard 3A- The student understands the issues involved in the creation and ratification of the United States Constitution and the new government it established.

Era 4: Expansion and Reform (1801 to 1861)

- Standard 1A- The student understands the international background and consequences of the Louisiana Purchase, the War of 1812, and the Monroe Doctrine.
- Standard 2D- The student understands the rapid growth of "the peculiar institution" after 1800 and the varied experiences of African Americans under slavery.
- Standard 3A- The student understands the changing character of American political life in "the age of the common man."
- Standard 4A- The student understands the abolitionist movement.
- Standard 4C- The student understands changing gender roles and the ideas and activities of women reformers.

Getting Started

Inquiry Question

(Courtesy of the Library of Virginia)

What might this place be?

How to Use the Inquiry Question

Begin each lesson by asking students to discuss possible answers to the inquiry question that accompanies the Getting Started image. To facilitate a whole class discussion, you may want to print the page and use it to make an overhead transparency. The purpose of the exercise is to engage students' interest in the lesson's topic by raising questions that can be answered as they complete the lesson.

Rather than serving merely as illustrations for the text, images are documents that play an integral role in helping students achieve the lesson's objectives.

To assist students in learning how to "read" visual materials, you may want to begin this section by having them complete the Photo Analysis Worksheet for one or more of the photos. The worksheet is appropriate for analyzing both historical and modern photographs and will help students develop a valuable skill.

Photo Analysis Worksheet

Step 1:

Examine the photograph for 10 seconds. How would you describe the photograph?

Step 2:

Divide the photograph into quadrants and study each section individually. What details--such as people, objects, activities--do you notice?

Step 3:

What other information--such as time period, location, season, reason photo was taken--can you gather from the photo?

Step 4:

How would you revise your first description of the photo using the information noted in Steps 2 and 3?

Step 5:

What questions do you have about the photograph? How might you find answers to these questions?

Setting the Stage

James Madison was born on March 16, 1751, and his home was Montpelier, a 5,000-acre plantation estate located in the Piedmont of Virginia. In the late 1750s his father began building the house where Madison spent his youth. Prior to this the family lived on the Montpelier property in what was probably, at the very least, a modest frame house, typical of Piedmont Virginia architecture of the time. Montpelier remained Madison's home throughout his adult life, although public service positions often called him away. Various public commitments included: the Continental Congress, 1780-1783; the Virginia Assembly, 1784-1787; the Federal Convention, 1787; the "new" Continental Congress, 1787-1789; the Federal Congress, 1789-1797; the Virginia Assembly, 1799-1800; secretary of state under Thomas Jefferson, 1801-1809; and president, 1809-1817. Even during these periods, however, Madison spent his long vacations at home.

In 1801 Madison, as the eldest son, inherited the estate his family had developed for more than 70 years. Following his retirement as president in 1817, Madison returned to Montpelier permanently. As he had anticipated, he and his wife, Dolley (1768-1849), received many visitors during this period. In fact, it was not uncommon for them to have as many as 25 guests or more requiring both room and board. Guests were a normal part of daily life on the plantations of Virginia gentry. Slavery was also a major part of plantation life. More than 100 enslaved African Americans provided the labor that supported and maintained Montpelier. The contributions of these slaves included agricultural labor, skilled craftsmanship, and domestic service.

Although it has undergone substantive modifications by its numerous owners since Madison, Montpelier's setting, main house, and grounds reflect the Madison era and offer useful insights into the daily life of the "last founding father" and a large Virginia plantation home in the early 19th century.

Locating the Site

Map 1: Virginia and the Chesapeake Bay Region

Several visitors to Montpelier have left interesting comments about the house and its location. The earliest account is found in a diary entry of Anna Brodeau Thornton:

Sptr. 5th 1802. arrived at Mr. Madison's country seat, about 110 miles from the City of Washington and situated in Orange County Virginia 5 miles from Orange Court House on one of the mountains...it is in a wild and romantic country, very generally covered with fine flourishing timber & forest trees.[1]

In December 1824, while visiting Thomas Jefferson at his Virginia plantation home, Monticello, Congressman George Ticknor drafted a letter to a friend describing the trip he and his companion, congressman and orator Daniel Webster, made from Washington to Montpelier:

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We have had an extremely pleasant visit in Virginia thus far, and have been much less annoyed by bad roads and bad inns than we supposed we should be, though both are certainly vile enough. We left Washington just a week ago, and came seventy miles in a steamboat, to Potomac Creek, and afterwards nine miles by land, to Fredericksburg....

On Saturday morning we reached Mr. Madison's, at Montpellier [sic]...a very fine, commanding situation, with the magnificent range of the Blue Ridge stretching along the whole horizon in front, at the distance of from twenty to thirty miles.[2]

Questions for Map 1

1. Examine Map 1 and read the notes that accompany the map above. Now locate Washington, D.C., Montpelier, and Fredericksburg, Virginia.

2. What is the location of Montpelier in relation to other important towns and cities of the region during Madison's time? to natural features? to transportation routes? How might these elements have contributed to the movement of people and goods into and out of this place?

3. How many miles is it from Washington, D.C., to Montpelier? from Montpelier to Monticello (Thomas Jefferson's plantation home near Charlottesville)? from Fredericksburg to Montpelier? If the average travel time was approximately 25 miles a day, how many days would it have taken Anna Thornton to get from Washington to Montpelier according to Map 1? according to her diary entry? What might account for the differences?

4. Why do you think Congressman Ticknor described the roads he traveled on as "certainly vile enough"? How might this have influenced travel?

5. What mountains do visitors to Montpelier describe as being quite beautiful and close to Montpelier? How many miles is it from Montpelier to those mountains? Of what major mountain range are those mountains a part? How might the mountains have impacted the house's location?

[1]*Diary of Anna B. Thornton (Mrs. William Thornton), 5 September 1802, Library of Congress.*
[2]*George Ticknor,* Life, Letters, and Journals of George Ticknor *(Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1876), vol. I, 346.*

Determining the Facts

Reading 1: Daily Life at Montpelier

Margaret Bayard Smith, a friend and admirer of the Madisons, made several trips to Montpelier from her home in Washington, D.C. One visit was recorded in this letter:

August 4th [1809], Montpelier, Wednesd. even.
The sadness which all day hung on my spirits was instantly dispelled by the cheering smile of Mrs. Madison and the friendly greeting of our good President. It was near five o'clock when we arrived, we were met at the door by Mr. M who led us in the dining room where some gentlemen were still smoking segars [*sic*] and drinking wine. Mrs. M. enter'd the moment afterwards, and after embracing me, took my hand, saying with a smile I will take you out of this smoke to a pleasanter room. She took me thro' the tea room to her chamber which opens from it. Everything bespoke comfort, I was going to take my seat on the sopha [*sic*], but she said I must lay down by her on her bed, and rest myself, she loosened my riding habit, took off my bonnet, and we threw ourselves on her bed. Wine, ice, punch and delightful pine-apples were immediately brought. No restraint, no ceremony. Hospitality is the presiding genius of this house, and Mrs. M. is kindness personified. She enquired why I had not brought the little girls; I told her the fear of incommoding my friends. 'Oh,' said she laughing, 'I should not have known they were here, among all the rest, for at this moment we have only three and twenty in the house.' 'Three and twenty,' exclaimed I! 'Why where do you store them?' 'Oh we have house room in plenty.' This I could easily believe, for the house seemed immense. It is a large two story house....[1]

Mary Cutts, Dolley Madison's niece, lived at Montpelier for a time in her youth after Madison's retirement in 1817. Her memoir of her life there contains detailed descriptions of daily life:

[Mr. Madison's] house was the resort of the distinguished men of the time; foreigners, tourists, artists and writers failed not to visit himself and Mr. Jefferson....

Mrs. Madison soon fell in with the Country customs. Barbecues were then at their height of popularity. To see the sumptuous board spread under the forest oaks, the growth of centuries, animals roasted whole, everything that a luxurious country could produce, wines, and the well filled punch bowl, to say nothing of the invigorating mountain air, was enough to fill the heart...with joy!... At these feasts the woods were alive with guests, carriages, horses, servants and children--for all went--often more than an hundred guests. All happy at the prospect of a meeting, which was a scene of pleasure and hilarity. The laugh with hearty good will, the jest, after the crops, "farmer's topics" and politics had been discussed. If not too late, these meetings were terminated by a dance.[2]

Congressman George Ticknor described his impressions in a letter written during his December 1824 trip to Montpelier with congressman and famous orator Daniel Webster:

We were received with a good deal of dignity and much cordiality, by Mr. and Mrs. Madison, in the portico, and immediately placed at ease....

We breakfasted at nine, dined about four, drank tea at seven, and went to bed at ten; that is, we went to our rooms, where we were furnished with everything we wanted, and where Mrs. Madison sent us a nice supper every night and a nice luncheon every forenoon. From ten o'clock in the morning till three we rode, walked, or remained in our rooms, Mr. and Mrs. Madison being then occupied. The table is very amble [ample] and elegant; and somewhat luxurious; it is evidently a serious item in the account of Mr. M's happiness, and it seems to be this habit to pass about an hour, after the cloth is removed, with a variety of wines of no mean quality.[3]

After first visiting Monticello (Jefferson's Virginia plantation home), Margaret Bayard Smith brought her family along when she made another of her visits to Montpelier in August of 1828. The party was caught in a sudden rainstorm and became disoriented in the heavily wooded countryside:

Having lost ourselves in the mountain road which leads thro' a wild woody track of ground, and wandering for some time in Mr. Madison's domain, which seemed interminable, we at last reached his hospitable mansion....We drove to the door. Mr. M. met us in the Portico and gave us a cordial welcome. In the Hall Mrs. Madison received me with open arms and that overflowing kindness and affection which seems part of her nature. We were first conducted into the Drawing room, which opens on the back Portico and thus commands a view through the whole house, which is surrounded with an extensive lawn, as green as spring; the lawn is enclosed with fine trees, chiefly forest, but interspersed with weeping willows and other ornamental trees, all of the most luxuriant growth and vivid verdure. It was a beautiful scene! The drawing-room walls are covered with pictures, some very fine, from the ancient master, but most of them portraits of most distinguished men....The mantelpiece, tables in each corner and in fact wherever one could be fixed, were filled with busts, and groups of figures in plaster, so that this apartment had more than the appearance of a museum of the arts than of a drawing room. It was a charming room, giving activity to the mind, by the historic and classic ideas that it awakened.[4]

Questions for Reading 1

1. Who were some of the people who visited Montpelier? Why did they come? How did they describe Montpelier's main house and natural surroundings? the Madisons? daily life?

2. What kinds of activities did the Madisons provide for their guests?

3. Do the accounts allow you to visualize the house and the grounds of Montpelier? Which account is most helpful?

4. Why would historians consider these documents important?

[1]*Gaillard Hunt, ed.*, The First Forty Years of Washington Society: Portrayed by the Family Letters of Mrs. Samuel Harrison Smith *(New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), 81-82.*
[2]*Mary Cutts Memoir, Cutts Collection, Library of Congress.*
[3]*George Ticknor,* Life, Letters, and Journals of George Ticknor *(Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1876) vol. I, 346-47.*
[4]*Gaillard Hunt, 232-34.*

Determining the Facts

Reading 2: Slavery at Montpelier

Before departing for Philadelphia in November 1790, James Madison wrote instructions for Montpelier's overseer and slaves that included many details about the proper amount of "Negroe" food rations, as well as the directions to provide shelter for the cattle and to "fallow with the large plows all the ground for oats & Corn." He concluded his instructions to his overseer with the following instruction: "To treat the Negroes with all the humanity & kindness consistent with their necessary subordination and work."[1]

Upon visiting then-Secretary of State Madison at Montpelier in 1807, Sir Augustus John Foster, the British minister, recorded these observations in his journal:

The Negro habitations are separate from the dwelling house both here and all over Virginia, and they form a kind of village as each Negro family would like, if they were allowed it, to live in a house by themselves. When at a distance from any town it is necessary they should be able to do all kind of handiwork; and accordingly, at Montpellier [*sic*] I found a forge, a turner's shop, a carpenter and wheelwright. All articles too that are wanted for farming or the use of the house were made on the spot, and I saw a very well constructed wagon that had just been completed.[2]

Margaret Bayard Smith's August 4, 1809, letter details her conversation with Nany, one of the Madisons' domestic slaves:

When the servant appeared with candles to show me my room, she insisted on going up stairs with me, assisted me to undress and chatted till I got into bed. How unassuming, how kind is this woman. How can any human being be her enemy? Truly in her there is to be found no gall, but the pure milk of human kindness. If I may say so, the maid was like the mistress [Dolley Madison]; she was very attentive all the time I was there, seeming as if she could not do enough, and was very talkative. As her mistress left the room, 'You have a good mistress Nany,' said I, 'Yes,' answered the affectionate creature with warmth, 'the best I believe in the world--I am sure I would not change her for any mistress in the whole country.'[3]

In 1824 during General Marquis de Lafayette's much heralded trip through America, he and his secretary, Auguste Levasseur, spent four days at Montpelier. Levasseur recorded these impressions in his journal:

Mr. Madison is now seventy-four years of age; but his body, which has been but little impaired, contains a mind still young, and filled with a kind sensibility....

I will not enter into particulars concerning the management of Mr. Madison's plantation: it is exactly what might be expected from a man distinguished by good taste and love of method, but unable to employ other labourers than slaves; who, whatever may be their

gratitude for the good treatment of their master, must always prefer their own present ease to the increase of his wealth.

The four days we spent at Mr. Madison's were agreeably divided between walks about his fine estate, and the still more engaging conversations that we enjoyed in the evenings, on the great interests of America, which are known to be so dear to Lafayette. The society [guests] which Madison assembled [on this occasion] at Montpellier [*sic*] was...com-posed of neighbouring [*sic*] planters, who appeared to me, in general, at least as intimately acquainted with the great political questions of their country, as those of agriculture. General Lafayette, who, while he appreciates the unfortunate position of slaveholders in the United States, and cannot overlook the greater part of the obstacles which oppose an immediate emancipation of the blacks, still never fails to take advantage of an opportunity to defend the right which all men, without exception, have to liberty, introduced the question of slavery among the friends of Mr. Madison. It was approached and discussed by them with frankness, and in such a manner as to confirm the opinion I had before formed of the noble sentiments of the greater part of the Virginians, on that deplorable subject. It seems to me that slavery cannot subsist much longer in Virginia: for the principle is condemned by all enlightened men; and when public opinion condemns a principle, its consequences cannot long continue.[4]

Mary Cutts, Dolley Madison's niece, recalled a description of slave life at Montpelier about 1824:

General [Marquis] de La Fayette when he visited Montpelier in 1825 [1824], said one of the most interesting sights he had witnessed in America was when he visited the log cabin of Granny Milly, 104 years of age, whose daughter and granddaughter, the youngest nearly 70 were all at rest, retired from their labors and living happily together; their patch of ground cultivated for them, their food and raiment supplied by "Mass Jimmy and Miss Dolley." None but an eye witness can know of the peace and ease of these sable sons of toil, to retire with health and not care for the morrow and surrounded by their progeny, on these plantations which remain in the same family over a century! Death of the master occasionally, but only occasionally, changes the scene for the young! but rare, indeed, is the instance of a Virginian, purchasing the estate, objecting to the incumbrance of superannuated slaves, who love their homes, from which, in many cases they have never been five miles. No, they stay with their indulgences, happy, because contented, until death leaves the log cabin free for other occupants! That region of Virginia is particularly healthful, and seemed to be very beneficial to the native Africans, of whom, there were several over one hundred years of age on the plantation.[5]

The young traveler from Massachusetts, George C. Shattuck, revealed more about Madison in this 1835 letter to his father, a doctor:

[Madison] is very cheerful, sprightly, much interested in what is going on in the world. He inquired a good deal about the factories and the operatives. He thinks that Virginia can employ her slave labor in this way with great profit, and that the Northern states will not be able to manufacture so cheaply as labor is so high with them. He also inquired about Washington and seemed to take great interest in the proceedings of congress.[6]

Paul Jennings was born a slave at Montpelier in 1799 and later became Madison's "body servant" (personal slave) until Madison's death. He shared his recollections of the Madisons:

Mrs. Madison was a remarkably fine woman. She was beloved by every body in Washington, white and colored....

Mr. Madison, I think, was one of the best men that ever lived. I never saw him in a passion, and never knew him to strike a slave, although he had over one hundred; neither would he allow an overseer to do it. Whenever any slaves were reported to him as stealing or 'cutting up' badly, he would send for them and admonish them privately, and never mortify them by doing it before others. They generally served him very faithfully.[7]

After Madison's death, Daniel Webster purchased Paul Jennings' freedom. Jennings was grateful and soon advocated freedom for all his people. He helped to plan a large-scale escape of slaves from Washington, D.C. In an 1848 letter he explained to Senator Webster why he felt the need to act in such a way:

Honored Friend,

A deep desire to be of help to my poor people has determined me to take a decided step in that direction. My only regret is that I shall appear ungrateful, in thus leaving with so little ceremony, one who has been uniformly kind and considerate and has rendered each moment of service a benefaction as well as pleasure. From the daily contact with your great personality which it has been mine to enjoy, has been imbibed a respect for moral obligations and the claims of duty. Both of these draw me towards the path I have chosen.

Jennings[8]

Questions for Reading 2

1. How did Sir Augustus John Foster describe the slave quarters? What different kinds of labor did the slaves provide? Why?

2. What was Nany's job as detailed by Margaret Smith? How did Smith describe her? If Nany had recorded her description of this exchange, how might it have been similar to or different from Smith's recollection? Why do you think primary source documentation by and about slaves is scant? How might this have had an impact on how slavery was interpreted?

3. What were Auguste Levasseur's views on slavery? How did he describe Lafayette's views? Why did he believe slavery would not subsist much longer in Virginia?

4. What observations did Mary Cutts make about the lives of slaves? How did these observations influence her perspective? How might Lafayette's

perspective have been influenced by his observations of Granny Milly's life? What might Milly have said about her life? Why?

5. What were Madison's words (ideas) and actions regarding slavery?

6. How did Paul Jennings regard his master and mistress? From what you know of his later life, what were his beliefs and behaviors regarding slavery? Were these attitudes and actions inconsistent? Why or why not?

[1]*Ralph Ketcham,* James Madison: A Biography *(Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990), 374, 703.*
[2]*Richard Beale Davies, ed.* Jeffersonian America: Notes on the United States of America Collected in the Years 1805-6-7 and 11-12 by Sir Augustus John Foster, Bart. *(San Marino: Huntington Library, 1954), 139-42.*
[3]*Gaillard Hunt, ed.,* The First Forty Years of Washington Society: Portrayed by the Family Letters of Mrs. Samuel Harrison Smith *(New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), 82-3.*
[4]*Auguste Levasseur,* Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825, Or, Journal of Travels in the United States *(New York: Gallaher and White, 1829), 221-22.*
[5]*Mary Cutts Memoir, Cutts Collection, Library of Congress.*
[6]*George C. Shattuck, Jr. to Dr. George C. Shattuck, 24 January 1835, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.*
[7]*Paul Jennings,* A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison *(Brooklyn: George C. Beadle, 1865). Reprinted in* White House History, *I, no. 1 (1983), 50.*
[8]*G. Franklin Edwards and Michael R. Winston, "Commentary: The Washington of Paul Jennings--White House Slave, Free Man, and Conspirator for Freedom,"* White House History, *I, no.1 (1983): 61.*

Determining the Facts

Reading 3: James and Dolley Madison at Montpelier

Many writers recalled their happy times at Montpelier and noted the great affection between James and Dolley Madison. During a busy professional trip in 1809 in which James and Dolley were separated, Madison explained to Dolley that the period of his stay would, "you may be sure...be shortened as much as possible. Everything around and within reminds me that you are absent, and makes me anxious to quit this solitude."[1]

Mary Cutts, Dolley's niece, described her memories of the Madisons' relationship when she lived for a time at Montpelier after 1817:

Mr. Madison dearly loved and was proud of his wife, the ornament of his house--she was his solace and comfort, he could not bear her to leave his presence, and she gratified him by being absent only when duty required. No matter how agreeably employed she was her first thought and instinct seemed to tell her when she was wanted--if engaged in conversation, she would quickly rise and say, 'I must go to Madison.' On his return from riding round the plantation she would meet him at the door with refreshment in her own hands.[2]

Richard Rush, a member of Madison's cabinet, found life at Montpelier very pleasing when he visited in late 1816 as the Madisons were preparing for retirement.

I have never seen Mr. Madison so well fixed any where as on his estate in Virginia; not even before he was burnt out here [when the White House was burned in Washington during the War of 1812]. His house would be esteemed a good one for many of our seats near Philadelphia, and is much larger than most of them. The situation is among mountains and very beautiful. A fine estate surrounds him, at the head of which he appears to eminent advantage....He has the reputation of being an excellent [plantation] manager, and is a model of kindness to his slaves. He lives with profuse hospitality, and in a way to strike the eye far more agreeably, than while keeping tavern here....He was never developed to me under so many interesting lights, as during the very delightful week I spent under his roof.[3]

After his visit to Montpelier in 1827, Henry Gilpin described the Madisons to his father. He explained that he had been waiting in the drawing room for the Madisons to appear:

In a little while, a fine portly looking lady [Mrs. Madison], with a straw bonnet, and shawl on came in....Soon after Mr. Madison came in....Mr. Madison is quite a short thin man, with his head bald except on the back, where his hair hangs down to his collar & over his ears, nicely powdered--he has gray but bright eyes, & small features--he looks scarcely as old as he is, 74 [76], and seems very hale & hearty--the expression of his

face is full of good humour--he was dressed in black, with breeches & old fashioned top boots, which he afterwards took off & sat during the evening in his white stockings, but the next day he had black silk on and looked very nice. Mrs. Madison slipped off to change her walking dress, & made herself quite stylish in a turban & fine gown--she has a great deal of dignity blended with good humour & knowledge of the world.[4]

In 1865 Paul Jennings recalled his last days with Madison:

I was always with Mr. Madison till he died, and shaved him every other day for sixteen years. For six months before his death, he was unable to walk, and spent most of his time reclined on a couch; but his mind was bright, and with his numerous visitors he talked with as much animation and strength of voice as I ever heard him in his best days. I was present when he died. That morning Sukey [a female house slave] brought him his breakfast, as usual. He could not swallow. His niece, Mrs. Willis said, 'What is the matter, Uncle James?' 'Nothing more than a change of mind, my dear.' His head instantly dropped, and he ceased breathing as quietly as the snuff of the candle goes out. He was about eighty-four years old, and was followed to the grave by an immense procession of white and colored people.[5]

Questions for Reading 2

1. How would you describe James? Dolley? their relationship? How did Mary Cutts regard her aunt's relationship with James Madison?

2. How did Richard Rush contrast Madison at home with Madison at the White House? Why is this significant?

3. How did Henry Gilpin describe the Madisons? How does this description compare with others?

4. What do you think Madison meant when he said, "Nothing more than a change of mind"? How are his last words symbolic of his life's work?

[1]*James Madison to Dolley Payne Madison, August 7, 1809, Lucia B. Cutts, ed.,* Memoirs and Letters of Dolley Madison *(Boston, 1886), 66-67.*
[2]*Mary Cutts Memoir, Cutts Collection, Library of Congress.*
[3]*The Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP), Rush-Ingersoll letters, Richard Rush to Charles J. Ingersoll, October 9, 1816.*
[4]*The Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP), Henry D. Gilpin Papers, Henry D. Gilpin to his Father, 1827. Ralph D. Gray, ed., "A Tour of Virginia in 1827: Letters of Henry D. Gilpin to his Father,"* Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, *76, no. 3 (October 1968): 469-70.*
[5]*Paul Jennings,* A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison *(Brooklyn: George C. Beadle, 1865). Reprinted in* White House History, *I, no. 1 (1983): 51.*

Visual Evidence

Illustration 1: Montpelier, c. 1836, engraving by J.F.E. Prud'homme after John G. Chapman

(Courtesy of the Library of Virginia)

Illustration 1, from an engraving, shows Montpelier as it looked during Madison's retirement years. Evident are additions he made to the house, including a two-story, 30-foot addition and large classical front portico (columned porch and entry) built in 1797-1800, and two one-story wings on each side of the house added in 1809-12 (only one is visible in the engraving).

Recent archeological investigation has uncovered a kitchen and possibly a slave quarter at Montpelier. It is normal for buildings and their functions to change over time. Buildings like slave quarters were continually being torn down and rebuilt throughout a plantation's history.

Questions for Painting 1

1. What does the presence of the cattle in the front yard or the carriage approaching the house tell you about life at Montpelier?

2. Why do you think the fence was built in front of the main house?

3. What kinds of noises and smells do you think would have been present?

4. How does this visual image compare and contrast with the descriptions of Montpelier in the readings?

5. Note the small structure that resembles a circular Greek temple that Madison added in 1809-12. The "temple" forms a decorative cover for the ice house. Why might Madison have desired such a covering?

6. What other outbuildings do students think would have been necessary to support a plantation the size of Montpelier? Why do you think these outbuildings no longer remain standing?

7. Why do you think the kitchen and slaves quarters were not depicted in the engraving?

8. Why do you think it is so difficult to gather evidence on the daily life of slaves?

Visual Evidence

Photo 1: Montpelier, 1994.

(Photo by Philip Beaurline, National Trust for Historic Preservation)

From 1844, when Dolley sold Montpelier, to 1983, Montpelier changed hands six times. Montpelier is now owned and operated as a 2,700-acre historic museum property of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Questions for Painting 1

1. List the similarities and differences between Photo 1 and Illustration 1. Why do you think the house itself has changed over time?

2. What can places like Montpelier can tell us about our past?

3. Do you think it is important to preserve historic places such as Montpelier? Why or why not?

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Putting It All Together

Through several firsthand accounts, students have gained a better understanding of Montpelier and the way the Madisons lived there. Have them keep those impressions in mind as they complete the following activities.

Activity 1: Researching the Madisons

Dolley Madison was as colorful and vivacious as her husband was quiet and serious. Have students work in pairs, and have half the pairs research textbooks and library sources for more information on the personality and character of James Madison, and have the other half do research on Dolley Madison. Tell students that biographies found in the public library's juvenile section are especially good to use as a first source. They are short, easy to read, and often include interesting anecdotes. After students have found sufficient data, have them meet with the other pairs of students who researched the same person. Ask each of the two groups to design a creative exhibit (using different visual, textual, or multimedia approaches) for the classroom that highlights the most interesting information they found about James and Dolley Madison. Ask students to discuss how their research contributed to their understanding of the Madisons and the time period in which they lived.

Activity 2: Slavery and Freedom

It is hard for people of the 20th century to understand how America's founders, such as the "Father of the Constitution," James Madison, could write that document's preamble and still deny liberty to the slaves. Have students consider these words: "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America." Then have students look again at Reading 2 and the excerpt from Paul Jennings' writings in Reading 3. Hold a classroom discussion in which students try to put themselves into the mindset of James Madison, and try to justify the institution of slavery as they believe Madison would have done. Next, have the students try to discuss the institution of slavery from Paul Jennings' point of view. Complete the activity by discussing the concepts of justice and fairness in different historical time periods. Make the point that people in the future may feel that some of our beliefs are as unjustifiable as we find the practice of slavery today.

Activity 3: A Historic Place in Your Neighborhood

Every community has a place that is historically and culturally significant. If students are unaware of the location of such a site in their community, have them contact the librarian of the local historical society or curator of a local museum. Those people will be able to help the students research the history of the place and the people who lived there. Have students find out as much as they can using primary source evidence that describes the place, the people, and their daily lives. Questions to which students should find answers include: Why is the place significant? How have geographic,

economic, social, and political factors influenced the place? What people lived at the site? How were they described? How did they earn a living? What were their daily lives like? Who visited the place? Why? Additional research strategies to consider include touring the historic site or researching secondary sources that relate to the place. When students have gathered as much information as possible, have them work with their local historical society or other sources to develop a special exhibit for the community. Finally, have students compare and contrast the local historic site with Montpelier.

Memories of Montpelier: Home of James and Dolley Madison-- Supplementary Resources

By looking at *Memories of Montpelier: Home of James and Dolley Madison,* students visit the Madisons' plantation home and their world of social prominence, and explore some contemporary views of slavery. Those interested in learning more will find that the Internet offers a variety of interesting materials.

National Trust For Historic Preservation http://www.montpelier.org/
http://www.nthp.org/
Montpelier is one of the 20 historic sites owned by the National Trust For Historic Preservation. In addition to the history of Montpelier, the website has information on landscaping as well as the present-day archaeology on the grounds of Montpelier. The National Trust for Historic Preservation provides leadership, education, and advocacy to save America's diverse historic places and revitalize our communities.

National Register of Historic Places: Montpelier
http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/journey/mpl.htm
The National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places with local partners created a travel itinerary along Virginia's Route 15 called "Journey Through Hollow Ground." The itinerary features a description and photographs of Montpelier.

University of Virginia: The Papers of James Madison http://www.virginia.edu/pjm/
"The Papers of James Madison" is a compilation of numerous documents surrounding the life of James Madison. The published volumes provide accurate texts of Madison's incoming and outgoing correspondence, informative notes on textual and subject matters, and comprehensive indexes. Also available are online images of documents written by James Madison and a biography.

Virginia Center for Digital History: The Dolley Madison Project
http://moderntimes.vcdh.virginia.edu/madison/
This website is devoted to the life, letters, and legacy of Dolley Payne Todd Madison, wife of James Madison and the most important First Lady of the 19th Century. Included on the site are materials to help you understand Mrs. Madison and to read her letters.

Library of Congress: American Memory Collection
http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ammemhome.html/
Search the American Memory Collection Web page for a variety of historical resources on James Madison. Included on the Web site are historic portraits of James and Dolley Madison, as well as correspondence, Congressional

Broadsides, and more. Also search on Montpelier for architectural documentation of the site by Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record.

The White House http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/presidents/jm4.html
Visit the White House Web site for historical biographies on James and Dolley Madison and for more information about the office of the presidency.

The Constitution Society http://www.constitution.org/
The Constitution Society is a private non-profit organization dedicated to research and public education on the principles of constitutional republican government. Included are numerous online documents on basic principles of the U.S. Constitution; founding documents; rights, powers, and duties; and much more.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

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